

that George Washington's Culper Spy Ring existed was not disclosed until 1930.

Nathan Hale of the often noted "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country" is claimed by Huntington to have been captured there and gave rise to the spy ring.

One of Culper's top spies was Robert Townsend of Raynham Hall, Oyster Bay, also known as Culper, Jr.

Townsend posed as a Tory merchant in New York City. He relayed intelligence concerning troop movements, supplies, and British plots, using an expensive spy ring, coded messages, invisible ink, and elaborate signal system using everything from drying laundry to buttons on clothing.

Their efforts turned the tide of the war by assisting Washington to outfox the British, even saving him from capture.

As Washington said, and as is recounted to members of today's CIA:

"There is nothing more necessary than good intelligence to frustrate a designing enemy, and nothing requires greater pains to obtain."

I would like to thank the North Shore Promotional Alliance, Raynham Hall, the Ward Melville Heritage Organization, and the producers of the AMC television show "Turn" for promoting the legacy of these unsung American patriots.

□ 1700

GIVING CONSUMERS A FINANCIAL CHOICE

(Mr. LAMALFA asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, in 2010, the Democratic majority passed the Dodd-Frank Act, a 2,300-page rewrite of America's financial laws. This sweeping law imposed significant costs on the economy, financial institutions, investors, small businesses, and American consumers.

Dodd-Frank was supposed to help lift up our economy; instead, what we got was the slowest, weakest recovery in 70 years. It was supposed to end taxpayer-funded bailouts; instead, it enshrined, permanently, Wall Street bailouts into law. It was supposed to make the financial system safer; instead, big banks got even bigger, and we have one less community bank or credit union every day. It was supposed to protect consumers; instead, higher bank fees, more expensive mortgages, fewer choices, and the most unaccountable government agency in the history of the Republic, the CFPB.

The Financial CHOICE Act moving through committee and to this floor soon will give consumers the protections they need and the opportunity for investment that has been so bottled up for many, many months—even years—in this country. The Financial CHOICE Act will be very helpful toward restart-

ing our economy and bringing back, once again, consumer choice.

Let's move this bill through.

PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BANKS of Indiana). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. RASKIN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to be here with my partner, Congresswoman JAYAPAL from the State of Washington, and we are running the Progressive Caucus Special Order hour.

We are delighted to kick off this session, which is about the extraordinary revelations this week and some breathtaking developments in Washington, with a statement by our distinguished colleague from Texas, SHEILA JACKSON LEE.

I yield to the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE).

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the distinguished gentleman from Maryland and the distinguished gentlewoman from Washington. Just by coincidence, Mr. Speaker, all three of us are members of the Judiciary Committee and had a very vigorous constitutional discussion this morning in a hearing on the responsibilities of the Judiciary Committee and, as well, the responsibilities of this Congress to the American people.

I think many of us offered our comments in the context that we did not speak as a Democrat or a Republican, though we are here on this floor as members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. We really spoke to our views and commitment as Americans.

Having served in this House for a period of time where I have seen the Judiciary Committee engage vigorously in impeachment proceedings for judges and Presidents, I know that the role of the Judiciary Committee is to be assured that the government—the executive, the legislature, the judiciary—works within the context of the Constitution.

So that is the spirit and the position in which I rise this evening: to share a few thoughts and to recount for our Members why this is a week that requires further oversight and insight and further assessment of whether the actions of the Oval Office, the executive—in this instance, the White House—have really complied with the Constitution of the United States.

I would, first of all, indicate that much of what I will say I will qualify and say that the President, or a President, or any President, would have the authority to do. So although, for example, the FBI Director is given a 10-year term, the individual serves at the will of the President of the United States of America. That means that President Trump, President Obama, President Bush, President Clinton, and others would have the authority to fire this

particular individual as they would have the right to fire Cabinet officers and others. They have the right to fire the Attorney General or the Deputy Attorney General, which may be one of the concerns we now have as we proceed to try to get to the facts of just a whole litany of issues.

Let me recount for you, as I discuss the firing of Director Comey, that in the last couple of days we have discerned that the Trump campaign operatives spoke to Russian operatives, Russian Government officials, 18 times in the last 7 months of the campaign.

We are well aware that the former NSA Director, something I think we, as Members of Congress—I will speak for myself—have never heard of in the tenure that I have been privileged to serve in the United States Congress, that an individual who was advising the President of the United States not in the form of a lobbyist, but in the form of an adviser in national security issues, was being paid by a foreign country.

So the advice that was given, two different recommendations: one, to drag out and throw to an unknown future a Turkish citizen who is here, who has been involved in a number of schools and good charitable work, who lives in Pennsylvania; one of his recommendations was to throw this individual who is statused, not undocumented, out into the hands of the present President of Turkey, who has been known over the years, recently, to deny political and religious rights and human rights. That was one recommendation.

The second recommendation, whether you liked it or disliked it, was to not arm the Kurds to help with the fight in Syria. That advice was given, both of those proposals as advice were given while General Flynn was on the payroll of a foreign government.

So you would have to wonder in the series of incidents how we have come to the point where the FBI Director, who was actively engaged in investigating—or the FBI, investigating General Flynn, as were congressional committees—General Flynn is now under a subpoena by, I believe, the Senate Intelligence Committee. All of that, all of those elements certainly respond that the Congress and the FBI were engaged in active investigations. I think the American people understand that.

The American people understand that if their chief of police was engaged in an active investigation of murder, one that the whole community was just outraged about, as any murder, as all the homicides that take place in a community that you desire to be safe, and one local elected official indicated that you are investigating my neighbor or you are investigating me and had the authority to fire the chief of police with the reason of one thing and then it became very clear that you were firing the chief of police who was actively engaged in a murder investigation that was going to help the whole community find the truth and bring the perpetrator to justice, you fired that police

chief because it was either you that was being investigated, local elected official, or it was your neighbor that was being investigated, you just took it upon yourself to cease and desist of that investigation, and that is a simple explanation of what has happened here in Washington.

Because Washington is big, because this government is huge, because it is the leader of the free world, because all the nations look up to it gives it no greater authority to stop an active investigation that is based upon the duties of the FBI, but also the laws of this land, and that is just what happened. Director Comey was unceremoniously fired; a man who has had great tenure in law enforcement as an attorney and prosecutor and, now, over the FBI.

Of course, the so-called explanation—which, by the way, has just been repeated in the last 45 minutes on international television, saying the same thing, that his firing was based upon Deputy Attorney General Rosenstein's representation in a memorandum that many of us question that gave a whole explanation of the incidents regarding former Secretary Clinton, which, of course, she was not found to have warranted any further review or investigation or prosecution. But that was what was used by President Trump just in the last, as I said, 30 to 45 minutes, when we know that the Deputy Attorney General has already denied that he was the cause and center of the firing of FBI Director Comey, yet it is still being repeated over and over and over and over again.

You would also know that not only did he deny—and we look forward to hearing him tomorrow, the House Members, as the Senate has already heard him. What he also indicated, or what was also said to vindicate him, is that the President came out on last Thursday with interviews with Lester Holt on NBC News that it wasn't anybody but him, and it was connected to this fake Russian thing. I am paraphrasing. I may not have all of the words.

So you have an executive that, one could analyze in a number of court decisions, may have been credited with an abuse of power. There was no legitimate failing in the work of Director Comey on this Russian investigation.

Just 30 to 45 minutes ago, another comment that was made is that he was unpopular, and that he did very, very poorly in the hearings last week. None of those are elements of dismissal. Maybe reprimand, maybe study a little bit more before you go to Senatorial hearings or House hearings, but that has nothing to do with being fired.

I don't know whether any of us want, every single day, as we make very tough decisions in this House, that we are assessed on whether or not we are very popular. What we want to do is do what is right for the American people. And whatever you might say, I assume Director Comey felt that he was doing what is right for the American people.

Many disagreed with his handling and assessment of the issues dealing with former Secretary Clinton, particularly in the October surprise. That is legitimate. But it is not legitimate to say, way past that incident and when this individual is actively engaged—and there is no question or no guarantee that, in spite of our displeasure as Democrats, if the Office of the Presidency had gone the other way that Director Comey would be fired. There was no suggestion of that, none whatsoever, even with disagreeing with actions.

But here we have not only the misrepresentation of the reason, but the declaration that the reason was because of this Russian thing.

Let me share with you the comments of Professor Tribe in a Washington Post article on May 13, 2017, as he recounts the whole issue of this action bearing upon the actions that are in the Constitution, such as impeachment, that relate to the questions of whether or not the Presidency or the President has acted appropriately:

"The question of Russian interference in the Presidential election and possible collusion with the Trump campaign go to the heart of our system and ability to conduct free and fair elections."

Therefore, it was free. It was what we do.

"Consider, too, how Trump embroiled Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein and Attorney General Jeff Sessions, despite Sessions' recusal from involvement in the Russia investigation, in preparing admittedly phony justifications for the firing on which Trump had already decided. Consider how Trump used the Vice President and White House staff to propagate a set of blatant untruths—before giving an interview to NBC's Lester Holt that exposed his true motivation.

"Trump accompanied that confession with self-serving—and manifestly false—assertions about having been assured by Comey that Trump himself was not under investigation. By Trump's own account, he asked Comey about his investigative status even as he was conducting the equivalent of a job interview in which Comey sought to retain his position as a Director."

So I believe that what we have here is a reasonable basis, those of us who have come to the floor tonight, to raise these questions and to be able to make sure that we do have a system of laws and that we do adhere to the rule of law.

□ 1715

We know that, subsequently, the Deputy Attorney General has appointed a special counsel under the provisions of the Attorney General. Of course, that individual could be fired. The regulation could be dismantled. But we hope that former Director Mueller of the FBI, who has impeccable credentials, will go forward and ensure that the American people know the truth.

That will be one part of it. I repeat, that will be one part of it. But, as I look at my closing remarks here, I want to ensure that we know that this is not something that is made up; that it continues to shock us, and it shocks the American people. It is not a made-up entity. It just continues with a long list of incidents, starting from the firing and then going up.

A comment Bill Moyers said: "The ensuing White House cover-up tries to pin the blame on a newly confirmed Deputy Attorney General whose hastily prepared memo criticizes Comey's 2016 statements. . . ."

But the late summer of 2015, a member of Trump's campaign staff called Lieutenant General Mike Flynn to ask if he is willing to meet with Trump. Trump agrees. Later Flynn says, four other Presidential candidates also reached out to him. There is a long list of items that may be true, may not be true, but clearly set a pattern, a pattern of the achilles heels of this Oval Office.

And so I would say to my colleagues that we should not turn a blind eye on this. I believe it is important to follow the facts. I have no quarrel with that. But neither am I afraid to use the term appropriately, an impeachment inquiry, but at least to find the facts of whether or not any of the actions that swirled around Director Comey, that swirled around General Flynn's and Director Comey's or the FBI's investigation of this particular series of incidents are in keeping with the responsibilities of the Congress, the Judiciary, in any elements there, or the Oval Office, the Presidency of the United States of America.

I think that the special prosecutor, for Americans to understand, deals specifically with pursuing or possible criminal acts. On the other hand, it is well known that the Congress can address how we fix this; how we make sure it doesn't happen again; how we work on behalf of the American people.

And so I hope that, as we conclude this Special Order, no one will point to any of the Members on this floor as taking this up as a personal cause against the President of the United States, or any President, and that we will respect the office, as we have always done. But it is our duty to shed light on these issues and shed light on these potential failures. It is our responsibility to take up the cause of curing, responding, fixing, and serving the American people.

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the Congresswoman for those extremely thoughtful and lucid remarks. I also wish to associate myself with the idea that, here on this issue, we cannot act purely as partisans. I suppose I can make a partisan speech with the best of them, but we are called upon during these very trying days to speak not as partisans but as patriots and as constitutional patriots.

I have been a professor of constitutional law for 27 years at American

University's Washington College of Law, and I am aware that the Founders of this country were determined to see that while we acted as partisans in the normal push and pull of legislative politics, when it comes to the basic character of our democracy, all of us try to need to act in a way that is consistent with the constitutional values that unify us.

Thomas Jefferson said: "If I could not go to heaven but with a party, I would not go there at all."

And George Washington said that we should never forget that the word "party" comes from the French word "partie." One part, each party is one part of the whole, and we have to try to keep our mind focused on the whole thing.

Well, the whole country is in danger right now. The events of the last week have been breathtaking and extraordinary. So let's take a moment to try to catch our breath to remember what is really at stake with the Russian connection, with the firing of National Security Advisor Michael Flynn after 24 days, with the firing of FBI Director James Comey this week after he refused to drop the investigation into Michael Flynn, and the Russian connection.

All of this is about, in the big picture, an organized and systematic assault on the American form of government and our Democratic political institutions.

During the 2016 Presidential election, 17 of our U.S. intelligence agencies, including the FBI, the CIA, the National Security Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and more than a dozen of others, got together and produced a report where they said, with a very high degree of certainty, that Vladimir Putin and Russian agents had an organized campaign orchestrated to engage in cyber espionage of the United States of America and our political institutions, and cyber sabotage of our political institutions with paid operatives working to disseminate fake news and propaganda, and to engineer leaks of mixtures of real emails mixed in with fake news, and so on.

All of it meant to throw the Presidential election, to destroy the chances of Hillary Clinton, and to destabilize American political democracy. We know that this modus operandi was used before the 2016 election in America, and it was used again after, as recently as the election in the Netherlands with Mr. Wilders, who was the favorite of Vladimir Putin, and then again in France with Marine Le Pen and the National Front where Mr. Putin and his operatives did a data dump the weekend before the French Presidential election.

Right before the blackout on campaigning, they again orchestrated hacks of the Macron campaign, and then tried to put out, again, a complete disinformation package on behalf of Le Pen.

Well, the intelligence agencies warned us that this was just a dress re-

hearsal for 2020. This is what Vladimir Putin is doing. He is trying to organize every dictator, despot, and kleptocrat on Earth together to destroy the liberal democracies, from the outside and from the inside.

Now, militarily, he is no match for the United States of America. Economically, he is no match for the United States of America. Intellectually, in terms of our political institutions and the democracy we have built, our Constitution, he is no match for America.

But he perceives a weakness, and the weakness is all about the internet because the internet links the whole world together. And if he can use the internet in order to hack into our institutions, both our party institutions and our election systems, and the media, and political campaigns, and then use that to sew confusion and propaganda, then he may, indeed, be able to gain control over the direction of our country, the sovereign people of America.

We were warned in that intelligence agency report, which is public, which everybody can find online, that this is their plan. It wasn't as if 2016 was a one-shot deal. This is exactly what Putin will continue to do.

So that is the background. Now, why is the firing of FBI Director James Comey so disturbing? He, of course, had a 10-year term, which was abruptly and suddenly cut off by President Trump after Comey told him—according to Comey's account, at least—that he would refuse to drop the investigation into Michael Flynn.

There are lots of people involved in this Russian connection story, including Page, and Stone, and Manafort, and Jared Kushner that go way beyond what we can talk about here tonight. But I just want to focus for the moment on Flynn.

Why is this sequence of events so disturbing? Well, it came out this week also that the Trump transition team, headed by none other than Vice President PENCE, knew that Flynn was under criminal investigation at the time that they decided to hire him as America's National Security Advisor. At a point when they decided to make him America's number one national security operative, they knew he was under criminal investigation for being a paid operative of the Turkish Government, a paid agent of the Turkish Government. And nonetheless, they brought him on.

And then when it was learned from the Acting Attorney General Sally Yates that Mr. Flynn was vulnerable to blackmail by Russians for having misled Vice President PENCE about his entanglement with the Russian Ambassador and his conversations with the Russian Ambassador, still they kept him on. So they brought him on, knowing he was under investigation, then they knew he lied about his connections to the Russians, and still they kept him on.

When the media finally broke the story of Flynn's collusive actions with foreign governments while he was the National Security Agency Director, Trump finally fired him, grudgingly, let him go, but said that Flynn was the victim somehow, and even tried to disassociate himself from the firing of Flynn.

Then we learn that the President tried to get the FBI Director James Comey to drop the investigation. Now, that is according to the FBI Director James Comey, who has never been accused of lying or perjury. So it is going to be his word against that of the President of the United States, who has said things like: Well, TED CRUZ' father participated in the assassination of JFK; and 5 million people voted illegally in the United States, with no evidence at all; and Barack Obama was born in Kenya, or Indonesia; and he had his phones tapped, and so on.

And so that issue might come down to a swearing contest between the former Director of the FBI, Mr. Comey, and President Trump. But in any event, according to Comey, Trump said to him: Will you let it go? Will you let the investigation of Flynn go? And Comey said he would not. And then Comey was let go instead.

So the question is: What does Michael Flynn know that everybody bends over backwards in the Trump administration to try to please him and placate him?

This is an administration that doesn't mind insulting our longest and most cherished allies in the world: NATO, which he has said is obsolete; Mexico, which he has had no problem insulting and affronting; Australia; and so on. Yet with Michael Flynn, everybody is tiptoeing. Everybody is doing a tap dance. What does Michael Flynn know about President Trump? It would seem as if he has got some kind of information about the President that the President doesn't want to get out there.

That is why a special counsel had to be appointed, and I am glad a special counsel was appointed. And I believe that Mr. Mueller is up to the task. And he has been known as a straight shooter, and a nonpartisan, someone who will follow the facts where they will go.

Well, in the meantime, we have got to look at the much broader issue. Because, of course, that is about the criminal deeds or actions of particular people. And some people may end up facing prosecution for what they did. But there is a much larger issue here. Because as a country, we have got to stand up for strong democracy all over the world.

But what is happening with all of these shenanigans, and sinister contacts and connections with the Turkish Government, and the Russian Government, and Orban in Hungary, and the killer dictator Duterte in the Philippines who orders that people he thinks are drug users should be shot on

sight in his country, who has been invited to the White House by President Trump?

Well, our country has got to stand up for what is great about our country: our Constitution and our Bill of Rights. President Trump said this is a witch hunt. But I want to close by telling you about a real witch hunt that is going on right now on the planet Earth.

And if we were not so distracted by the spreading staph infection in the White House, we would be able to help in terms of this situation. And I refer to you an article that was in the newspaper a couple of days ago in *The New York Times* about the governor of Jakarta, one of the largest cities in Indonesia.

□ 1730

He is Christian. He is the Governor of Jakarta. Someone was running against him and said that all the Muslims should vote against him because he is Christian. They should have to vote for a Muslim because the Koran tells them to. The governor objected.

Mr. Basuki said: That is not right. The Koran doesn't say that Muslims must vote for Muslims. Muslims can vote for me, even though I am a Christian.

He was prosecuted, arrested for blasphemy against the Koran, against Islam, and sentenced to 2 years hard time in a maximum security prison in Indonesia.

In America, where we have a First Amendment and freedom of conscience, free exercise of religion, separation of church and State, we got rid of blasphemy a long time ago. But now we have got a human being—a governor, no less—who is in prison for hard time in Indonesia, one of our allies. We should not let that stand.

There are hundreds of people all over the Earth who are in prison for blasphemy or apostasy or heresy—religious offenses—and we are saying nothing about it. In Russia itself, there were just marches a month ago against political corruption and authoritarianism. Tens of thousands of people. Our government did nothing. Why? Some of them are on the payroll of Russian autocrats, and others just don't care.

We should be on the side of the people of Russia who are fighting for democracy, fighting for religious freedom, fighting for human rights. That is what America should be about. That is what is really at stake here.

Our government should not be consumed with self-interest and promoting people's corporate agendas. It should not be consumed with the personal vanity of the President. It should not be about private agendas. It should be about the public good of the American people and standing with democracies all over the Earth.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

CONGRESSIONAL PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS: DIRECTOR COMEY FIRING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentlewoman from Washington (Ms. JAYAPAL) is recognized for the remainder of the hour as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE). She has been such a champion on progressive issues for so long. BARBARA LEE still speaks for me across the country.

Ms. LEE. Let me thank Congresswoman JAYAPAL for yielding and for holding this important issue on this existential threat to our democracy. Also, I just have to say that she has just hit the ground running here on behalf of the American people, on behalf of working men and women, on behalf of peace and security in the world, on behalf of our democracy. So I thank her for her leadership.

The constant stream of allegations and scandals springing from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue is really quite shocking. I have to admit that, after watching President Trump fire the FBI Director who was investigating him, I thought things could not get any worse. But just days later, President Trump blundered into sharing classified intelligence with Russian officials.

As the Nation and the world grappled with the aftermath of this revelation, yet more shocking news was breaking. The *New York Times* has alleged that, before he was fired, Director Comey was pressured by President Trump to shut down an ongoing investigation into General Michael Flynn's possible collusion with the Russians.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear with the American people. If *The New York Times* report is true, President Trump's attempts to influence a Federal probe can only be described in one way, and that is obstruction of justice. And, yes, we all know obstruction of justice is an impeachable offense.

Right now, one thing, though, is crystal clear: The President's abuse of power has plunged this Nation into a full-blown constitutional crisis. This crisis goes far beyond party interests. Every American, Democrat or Republican, should be concerned by these allegations.

President Trump's actions have threatened national security, the rule of law, and the independence of our Nation's justice system. His actions dishonor the Office of the Presidency and place this Nation and our allies in danger.

The reports of last week underscore the need to establish a bipartisan, independent commission to get to the bottom of Russian interference in our elections once and for all. It is vitally important that Director Mueller—and I am very pleased that the Department of Justice appointed him; this is one step in the right direction—be given the resources and the autonomy to conduct an investigation.

Unfortunately, President Trump said that this investigation is a witch hunt. Nothing could be further from the truth. The American people deserve to know the facts about possible collusion between Russia and the Trump campaign. Our democracy must be defended at all costs.

I thank Congresswoman JAYAPAL for giving us a chance to speak tonight about this very dangerous moment that we are in, about Presidential abuse, and, really, about the preservation of our democracy. The Congressional Progressive Caucus continues to lead on so many issues that are important to this country and to the world.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Mr. Speaker, it is my great honor to yield to the distinguished gentlewoman from Illinois (Ms. SCHAKOWSKY), who has also been a leader in the Progressive Caucus on so many issues, from the death penalty to immigration to healthcare.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Congresswoman JAYAPAL and the Congressional Progressive Caucus for convening this 1-hour discussion about our democracy at risk.

I don't think it is really an exaggeration that what we are seeing right now is our democracy actually under attack. Unfortunately, it is from our own White House.

I think Americans around the country, regardless of their political party or even political persuasion, are kind of shaking their head and saying: What the heck is going on?

Every day, there is some sort of a new and disturbing revelation. We found out that the President of the United States just seems to have blurted out highly, highly classified information in a meeting with the Russian Ambassador and the Russian Foreign Minister—information that was passed on, it seems, from the Israelis, but actually could put some of the people who are doing the most delicate work on the ground in some danger. And then, of course, last week, the President fired the FBI Director, James Comey.

As a Democrat, I certainly have had problems in the past with James Comey. I think that he helped influence the outcome of the election. But it turns out that on national television the President basically admitted, after giving various explanations of the firing, that it came down to the Russian investigation.

Then we find out that James Comey actually took notes of a meeting with the President where the President asked him to drop the investigation of General Flynn and his connection to the Russians. It is a real question of what is going on.

It was an important step when, yesterday, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein took the important first step of appointing a special counsel to investigate the Russia connection and the relationship between this administration of President Trump and the Russians.